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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes two joint sessions held by the Indian Nations At Risk Task Force and the National Advisory Council on Indian Education to hear testimony on the causes of high Native American dropout rates and on dropout prevention strategies. Educators and parents provided information defining the problem and outlining factors contributing to high Native dropout rates. These factors included: the failure of the traditional education system, which labels students and has expectations of failure for Natives; racial bias and lack of respect for Native culture in school; poor racial relations in school and community; unmet student needs in the areas of health and nutrition; historical constraints on parent participation; dilapidated and inadequate facilities at Bureau of Indian Affairs schools; poor communications between Indian communities and the federal Office of Indian Education; and poverty and other family problems. Other testimony described dropout prevention programs and strategies that are working: community action to influence the local school system; college-school cooperation that focuses on identifying candidates for teaching among Native high school students and encouraging them to stay in school; early intervention and counseling for at-risk students; cultural sensitivity training for teachers and other school staff; Title V programs providing remediation and alternative instruction; attention to student attendance; hiring an Indian liaison to work with parents, students, and the school; teen parenting programs; community and business partnerships; employability strategies; increasing parent participation; and adult education programs for overage students. (SV)

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INAR/NACIE Joint Issues Sessions
NIEA 22nd Annual Conference - San Diego, California
October 15, 1990

"Dropout Prevention"

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INAR/NACIE Joint Issues Sessions
NIEA 22nd Annual Conference - San Diego, California
October 15, 1990

Summary: "Dropout Prevention"

The first issues session on Dropout Prevention was co-hosted by INAR Task Force member Ivan L. Sidney and NACIE Council member Gloria Duus. The second session on this issue was co-hosted by INAR Task Force Member David L. Beaulieu and NACIE Council member Buck Martin.

I. Defining the Problem

- The problem of dropouts is not only a school issue: it is a family issue, a community issue, an issue for our tribal governments, and also a state and national issue.

- On a national basis, we are losing about 35 to 45 percent of our students in high schools between the time they enroll as freshmen and graduation. This is much higher than the national average and we need to provide services to these students to keep them in school, through graduation, and help them to continue their education beyond high school.

- At-risk Indian students are not only those at the high school level; they include students in all grades kindergarten through 12. They start dropping out in the early grades--some in fourth and fifth grade. So we need to start identifying and serving them at early ages.

- In our district the Indian students' dropout rate is phenomenal. The overall district dropout rate is 2 percent, but 40 percent of those who drop out are Indian. They have alternatives. We have an alternative high school or they can take a district correspondence course. But often we don't know where they are; they just vanish and this is our big concern. If there were some kind of accountability among those who are supposed to be responsible, perhaps we wouldn't be in this dilemma.

II. Contributing Factors

Studies Identify Multiple Factors

- In Browning, MT, some information was collected about the factors that cause students to drop out. Based on information collected from parents, students, teachers, and community members we identified ten top factors. In order of priority, they include:

1. poor grades
2. drug and alcohol user/abuser & poor school attendance
3. drug and alcohol affected
4. lack of self-esteem
5. abused and neglected
6. physical and sexual abuse
7. defeatist attitude towards school
8. discipline problems in school
9. pregnancy and teenage parenthood
10. young parents lacking parenting skills

One of the things that did not come up was poverty, although that is a big factor in the community, especially since we have a 60 to 80 percent unemployment rate. We live in poverty every day, so perhaps our community does not identify it as a factor the way national studies do.

- Dr. Brandt, co-author and one of the researchers on the Navajo Dropout Study, reported that, in addition to community and parental factors mentioned by others, their study had determined that lack of challenge in the curriculum and the tendency of teachers to underestimate students' abilities is a factor in discouraging students. There is a tremendous amount of boredom in the Indian school curriculum as well as blatant racism. I think we have particularly underestimated racism in schools, especially those in border towns. This is a problem we don't really want to confront, but it is increasing in many regions.

- Red Lake Public School District in Minnesota, which serves a population that is nearly 100 percent Indian from the Red Lake Reservation, found that all of their dropouts were overaged Indian students in the high school. Eighty-eight percent were two years older than grade level, and 11 percent were one year older than grade level. So there is a direct relationship between the failure of schools to educate kids and those who drop out of that school district.

Failure of the Education System

- Our public education systems have clearly failed our students. Our students have not failed; it is the systems we have created that have failed. If you look at all the issues related to the dropout question and the symptoms of Indian education, whether it be dropouts, pushouts, or academic failure, I believe we need to consider restructuring our systems and organizations so that these children feel that they are participating in a process where they can be successful. I was labeled as a student at risk and I was in a system where I was told that I did not belong. This message can be delivered by tracking, fragmentation of a course of studies, anything that causes Indian students to develop low self-esteem and expectations of failure. In time you begin to believe that you will fail no matter what you do.

- I work as a teacher in a Denver adult education program that serves high school dropouts. One thing all these students have in common is that the traditional school system failed them. They did not fail the system. They were also all categorized in school as dumb, as slow learners, as belligerent. When I failed, I was categorized as "emotionally immature." That is a good one, and to this day, I am still trying to work on my emotional immaturity.

- Some have said that all students are gifted, and you know they are. But we have a bunch of vials and vases that say "You are gifted," or "You don't quite make the grade," and so forth. So we have labeled all these classes of students. Once they've been labeled, who are they trying to keep up with? Where does their self-esteem come from? These are things we have to look at if we are going to salvage those kids.

- Another problem is that there is a big transition for students when they go from self-contained classrooms in elementary school to subject-by-subject classes in high school and this transition is not managed very well. The difference in style is one of the factors that loses a lot of Indian students. So schools in Minnesota are trying to improve this transition.

Teacher and Staff Attitudes

- My father's last name used to be Belintigen, but when he went to work for the Southern Pacific Railroad, the person who hired him couldn't spell it, so he changed it to Ben, which is

now my last name. A lot of times young people enter the classroom and our names aren't good enough. Then the child wonders if he or she is good enough. This starts some Native children off with two strikes against them.

- We have such a terrible time trying to find Indian people to teach in public schools. As a substitute teacher in Fort Peck I found a major problem with non-Indian teachers. I believe that the biggest contributors to dropouts in grades K through 12 are non-Indian teachers who don't know how to relate to Indian children. They have a detention center at Fort Peck, and rather than trying to deal with the kids on a one-on-one basis, they send them to detention. If I were one of those children, I think I would probably drop out, too.

- A woman from Tacoma, WA reported that her children were in a public school and received no program that gave special emphasis to their Indian culture. To this day teachers still make fun of children's Indian names. Many children today come off the reservation still speaking their own language, but they are given no special consideration as learners. They are simply passed on to the next grade, or put in special education classes so the schools can get more money for them. The public schools in Tacoma are more concerned about the Cambodians and the Japanese. The Bush Administration needs to place more emphasis on meeting the educational needs of America's Native people.

  I pulled my children out of public school and put them in an Indian school where they are doing much better and learning a lot more. Our school doesn't have any dropouts. We keep the kids in school and we give them special recognition. They learn their language and their culture and take pride in the program. But something needs to be done to press the public schools to be more respectful of Native Americans in this land.

- I am from the Cree community in Hobbema, Alberta, Canada, and I came seeking innovative approaches and ideas for combating the dropout situation we are facing at home. We seem to have better success at the adult education level, where we are providing incentives and subsidies for single parents and tribally sponsored day care for their kids. But the problem we have in the schools is very low attendance. We have tried to develop awards and incentives for students in grades kindergarten through 12. Slowly, slowly we are progressing but we would like to be progressing at a faster rate. We recognize those who maintain good attendance and those who do well academically and athletically. We get student's interest, but not the parents. Our biggest problem is not drugs or alcohol, it is the attitudes of our tribal members and the attitudes of school authorities. I come from a community where the Indian-white relationship is terrible. The non-Indian school where we send our children is in a redneck and racist community where students are always putting Indian students and the Indian community down. The general attitude is that Indians are dumb and lazy and can't learn. This sort of sets into an Indian child's thinking the notion that, "If I am dumb, if I'm an idiot, if I am lazy, I am not going to learn." So this is a big problem we face. Another problem we face, since our schools are operated by the federal government, is that we get a lot of teachers who can't find jobs in other jurisdictions. They come feeling that they don't have to be good since they are just going to be working in an Indian school and the kids are dumb already. The Indian community does not have adequate input with the schools to be able to impact this situation. We have no control over the teachers we get whether it is for our Indian school or for the white schools.

- The Phoenix Indian Center, which is a community-based organization, has encountered a lot of negative attitudes among school district staff toward any Native American specialist who comes in to the schools. This is because early on a lot of emphasis was in working with the students on cultural studies. The schools began to questions, what Indian education really

was all about. So we found we were in a tough situation trying to satisfy both the Indian community and the non-Indian educational community. The district used to have 12 Native American specialists and now they only have two. Our project staff noticed that a lot of Indian students were falling through the cracks and that attendance rates were poor.

- When you run an alternative classroom, you really have to hang your ego on the door and walk in without it, because you have to give to those kids. A large part of our problem is we have teachers who are saying "you have to respect me" without working with these kids in a way that will generate that respect. You know, you can't demand respect.

Health and Wellness

- Health is a big consideration. Some students arrive at school hungry and cold, or both. The socioeconomic conditions in communities are devastating right now for our kids in school, and this is nothing new to our people.

- Student health is an important factor, yet some schools systems are cutting back on the number of school health nurses or transferring some of their responsibility to clerical support staff reportedly because of tight funding. The cost of delivering services becomes greater all the time and they have to look for places to cut. Like the federal government, they cut at the most vulnerable spots and frequently these are also where programs are most needed.

- Our district had one nurse serving two schools and then when they began to cut back, they expected the principals and secretaries to do the health work in emergencies. As a public health nurse, I do not see how these untrained people can take over the job of a school nurse. School nurses are trained to see with a third eye. For example, we had a little kindergarten girl whose eyes I tested and they were perfect the first year. Then next year I checked and one eye was off 20 points. Because she was little, I checked and rechecked to be sure she was understanding the directions, and still she did not pass. I called the parent in and advised her to have it checked and that little girl had an eye cancer. Her eye was enucleated and she is still alive today because we caught it early. So I feel that I saved her life. The same kind of thing happened with another little girl who had a sore knee and was on crutches for two weeks. She was seeing the doctors, but nothing was being done and there was no improvement. Finally she was diagnosed with a knee cancer and had to have her leg amputated. But she is alive today. How can anyone detect these kinds of things if they are untrained? When we eliminate trained school nurses, we are shortchanging our children. If children are not healthy, how can they study?

Historical Constraints on Parental Involvement

- As far as parental involvement is concerned, those of us who went to boarding school were never given any opportunity to maintain our child-parent relationship. We were given crew cuts, given uniforms, and marched to the cafeteria and to classes. The staff never had any parenting training, so we didn't get any of the love and hugs we needed. This has caused dysfunction in our communities. Add to that the substance abuse issues, and as things go on we don't have good parenting skills. Our children suffer from this, so where do we begin?

Dilapidated and Inadequate Facilities

- One of the characteristics of an effective school is that it creates a positive learning environment and school climate that supports the physical and mental health of the children. I am really questioning whether the Bureau of Indian Affairs and its subsidiaries are really

interested in providing a positive environment as far as infrastructure is concerned. I know money is tight, but we seem to be faced with a process that is slowly bleeding most of the schools to death. If you look across Indian country you find that the buildings are in very poor state of maintenance. When a child comes into that kind of a situation, where even the heating and plumbing are inadequate, it is hard to have a positive environment. So I would like to know what will be the goals of the systems in terms of updating, remodeling, and/or providing new structures for Indian community schools.

- It seems the schools were built for a 20-year cycle. Those 20 years have passed and the buildings are old and dilapidated. A number of them were built on faults and they're sinking or they are unsafe.

- I am working with a BIA dormitory that can house 200 young people. This year we will have a very high dropout rate because evidently there was poor collaboration between the BIA and the group doing construction and renovation. It was supposed to be ready by October or November, and now we are told that it won't be completed until April or May. This means that many of our students have to commute 90 miles round trip. Several of them have been picked up and put in jail for alcohol problems before they even stepped on the bus to head back home. Several of our girls who would have been in the dormitory are pregnant. I'm just not sure how long they will stick with the long commute. I do not know who didn't coordinate this properly, but evidently it was put on an eleven-month construction schedule.

Contributing Problems at the Federal Level

- There is too much turnover of staff in the Office of Indian Education in Washington, DC. We need consistency of staff in order to get the support we need for success and in order to be kept abreast of what is going on throughout Indian country. The Office of Indian Education should also be accountable to Indian parents and Indian communities, in the same way that schools should be accountable. It is better now that we have a new Director but we need to keep it that way. We need to have strong communication between Washington, DC and the local level.

- As we try to address the dropout problem, it seems really difficult to say where to begin. I recall 1967, when Senator Robert Kennedy was in Flagstaff running these same kinds of hearings. The same kinds of comments were being raised. Those studies sat on someone's shelf for a number of years until finally someone wondered why they were gathering dust and decided to do something. Then we heard a little about the 560 local control. But in this local control, the funds did not come down the way they should have. A lot of our teachers did not have an opportunity to go on for further training, unlike the old Bureau system where they were allowed educational leave with pay.

- I have always believed in a holistic approach to education that focuses on the health and well-being of the students in addition to the academic part of schooling. But we are told we must work on "the nation at risk," and the bureaucratic system needs to know what is working and what isn't working. To determine this they look at test results and the academic achievement of students. What they don't look at is what it takes to get a student to achieve academically. Nevertheless, we continue to work on this area.

Other Contributing Factors

- There are a lot of reasons why students drop out that have nothing to do with schools. Some students become parents. Some can't go to school for other reasons.

- We work in a border town and serve students from the reservation and off the reservation. Some of them don't make it to school because they don't have the clothes, or they haven't had their physical exam because their parents couldn't bring them in from the reservation.

- At Fort Washakie in Wyoming, we have a very high dropout rate at our school, and I attribute this in part to all of the video cassette films that our students can pick up at groceries and video stores and take home to watch. These films often depict people going out and making a million bucks just by selling some kind of drugs. They give kids crazy ideas, and the impression that they don't have to go to school to have a good life. They just have to go out and meet up with some drug dealer and they can also make millions.

III. Programs and Strategies That Work

Influencing the System

- When our community finally was able to put a Native person on the school board, she discovered for the first time that they were supposed to hold a community hearing to determine how Impact Aid monies would be used. We realized that we were getting all of this money and it had never come into the community. When this became known there were all kinds of rumors and ideas floating around on the reservation about the use of the $100,000. But we realized that it could be used in any way the county sees fit and we are just there for input. So we hired someone to come in and serve as a liaison between the school and the parents, kids, and community. She has been there a couple of years and it is slowly working. So it is really a matter of having your community stand up and demand to have a voice in how this money will be spent. They don't have to take your advice, but if you speak as a community, there are ways of obtaining some of the needed programs and services.

- The differences between teaching styles and student learning styles are also important factors. Santa Barbara County, through the Superintendent of Schools, has a partnering relationship with Santa Barbara Community College entitled Tomorrow's Teacher Program. We are all in agreement that we want to find candidates for teaching who are committed and have a passion, so we need to find these young people. This can help many students stay in school, if they know that we are out looking for young people who are interested in teaching and have ideas. They know what works and what doesn't work. If we share the responsibility and allow students to own their own learning, teachers can become facilitators, helping students identify their needs and interests, allowing things to happen, and encouraging cooperative learning situations.

Early Intervention

- The Principal of Dilcon School on Navajo reported that her district was concerned about the at-risk students because they had found that, in a K through 8 school with 500 students, about one-third of the eighth graders were graduating with social promotions, meaning they did not meet academic standards. So this year we have established an alternative classroom where different approaches to teaching are used. We are currently re-doing the curriculum to provide adult level content at lower levels of reading ability. When we put students in resource or remedial classes, they get second and third grade content and that is why they are dropping out. We are very blunt with them about the situation. We tell them "you are failing and we are going to give you a chance to do something about it, but you are going to work in this classroom. You are a sixth grader, and if you work hard you can achieve sufficient academic growth in the next two years and we will graduate you." We do this to really

challenge the kids. None of these kids qualify for Chapter 1, but all are at least two years behind grade level, and many have been retained sometime between kindergarten and sixth grade. They are the kids who have fallen through the cracks.

As an administrator you have to take a tough stand, because some teachers will tell you you are crazy and that you are labeling these kids. I tell them that just because they get students through the system with social promotions doesn't mean they are going to make it through high school. They are literally being trashed and they don't even have a chance at college. We have to give them a place where they can have a chance. We have to be flexible to really help these kids. Retaining them is not the answer. We are hoping our new program will provide a better solution. Of course, then you have to worry about what happens to them when they go on to high school.

- The Indian student dropout prevention program in Phoenix Union High School District consists primarily of early intervention by Native American counselors who work with eighth graders. They help them identify their interests, abilities, and career aspirations, and visit their homes in the summer and sit down with both the student and parents to share information about the high school academic program, what the requirements are, what they can and can't expect, and work out a four year plan with the student. This way they have a general guideline for the next four years if they wish to use it. At the same time, they gather a lot of information about the family and student which they can integrate into the record that is available when the student enters in the fall. This way the school knows whether or not students need financial assistance, free lunches, bus tokens, and all of the other little things that add up to big obstacles. Once the students are on campus, our counselors continue to offer them support. Out of a total of 20,000 students, Indian students make up 3.6 percent. When we started the program five years ago, we were operating with close to an annual 25 percent dropout rate, and now we are down to 17.3, so it has been fairly effective.

- At Little Big Horn Tribal Community College, faculty have been working with dropouts who are still in school. The students we focus on are still attending school but have dropped out of the math and science tracks altogether. We are interested in creating an environment where they can have lots of opportunity for discovery and for trial and error--in a laboratory situation, or on a nature exploration of a river bottom, grassland, or swampy area on the reservation. We take fifth and sixth graders in an ungraded science situation and involve them with at least one or two full-time scientists from our faculty and science students from our college. These people are often known to our students from the community. We let them try things out without the harshness of competing with each other for grades and without being judged, so they can just experience the joys of discovery in science and math. Hopefully they are encouraged to keep up their interest and sign up for some of the more difficult subjects when they get to seventh grade. We feel this is important, because if they drop out of science and math, they will be excluding themselves from as many as 40 percent of the career opportunities that will be available. We have seen from our college perspective so many students walk through our doors who need a full year or two of developmental education which they might not have needed if they had made better decisions in seventh grade. They end up wasting a whole year of financial aid just catching up, and even if they have the potential to learn science, they may run out of money by their junior year and then have to drop out of college. We have had this happen with 11 or 12 of our students, so we are trying to address it at the front end.

Improving Teacher and Staff Attitudes

- In our efforts to sensitize teachers to the needs of Native American students, it is important that we do not neglect the classified staff in the school district. The office secretaries, counseling secretaries, and the registrar can have a tremendous impact on Native students who are coming into the high school setting. For instance, they will often ask, "Where is your birth certificate? You know you've got to have a birth certificate. How come you didn't bring your birth certificate?" Now a white or black student might bristle at this and then dish it right back, but a lot of Indian students are going to back off and then leave and that will be the last time you see them. So it is important to work with those staff who are likely to be the first to see the student and family. I would like to see classified staff actually taken through the same process that students go through to register and have to meet the same requirements for documentation. You know we are often talking about a student coming from a school with 600 to 700 kids into a school with 2,000, and it is a big shock to them.

At the same time it is important to prepare students and parents by telling them that they are going to find these kinds of people at the high school and they may be grouchy and give you a hard time. This way they will know what to expect when they get there. In our Indian education program we try to cushion and buffer this process as best we can, but we can't be everywhere at once. If students know what to expect, it may be easier for them to take and they will be willing to put up with a little of it to stay in school.

Title V Dropout Prevention

- Title V is a must in the United States for all Indian students. It should be mandated for any school in the country that serves more than ten Indian students. These schools should each have parent advisory committees where Indian parents can voice their support and concerns about the public school as a whole. There are schools out there that are misusing their Title V and JOM funds. The money is supposed to be spent on Indian students and not to build a playground or fund other general school expenses. We need better accountability in these programs.

- Title V is working! One program in a public system with 10 percent Indian population indicated that the students it serves are maintaining an 86 percent attendance rate, an overall 2.2 grade point average, and a 90 percent graduation rate. We just need to be able to serve more students, and we need better district accountability for the use of funds.

- The Title V program in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has persuaded the school district to agree to a pilot demonstration program for their middle and high school students (grades 7 through 12). They found they were losing students in the seventh grade, and there were no alternative programs in the district to meet the needs of Indian students. Some of the problems in their urban district include the fact that the Indian population is so spread out that kids are not comfortable in the classrooms. They need a lot of individualized attention because of their low academic levels.

The pilot program is for students who are not attending any school. It started with about seven students in the Title V supervisor's office. By November they had official approval to go ahead with a program that combined the Indian Education program office and a classroom staffed by a certified Indian teacher. The teacher found that a lot of the kids can't read, can't write, and don't know their math. Some students in the class are functioning at second and third grade levels academically and others are at college level. The alternative classroom now has 25 Indian students.

When we talk to administrators and teachers in our district, they always tell us that there aren't enough dollars. Our Indian population is only about 2 percent of the district total, so we are the minority of the minorities and can't receive any priority attention. It has taken the Indian teacher about a year to even get some of these kids to come out of their shell to do work so that he can see where they are academically and begin working with them to increase their academic ability. These are the kind of kids whom nobody wanted in their classroom. Nobody wanted to deal with the multitude of problems in their personal and family life. So they were more or less pushed out of school, although the Grand Rapids administration would not like to hear that.

We have seen an 80 percent increase in student attendance and a 75 percent increase in academic ability especially with those for whom we had no previously complete record of testing. They either wouldn't take the tests, or wouldn't show up, or would have the pretests but no posttests. At this point we feel that the district should listen to Indian people and not be afraid to let Indian people run programs, because Indian kids work better with Indian people. These kids need people who are going to care about them and be supportive.

The Title V program in Santa Fe Public Schools works with a small minority of the overall district student population, but the Native American dropout rate is disproportionately high. Despite this, the district administration does not want to look at the problem. There is no attitude there that supports working to improve the situation.

So the Title V program is doing its best to address the problems with very limited amounts of funding and staff. This year and last year we have been working with high school students who are identified as "at risk." We are targeting between 20 and 30 students who have truancy problems and all of the other at risk factors. Last year we had a support person who worked with them primarily on social integration. Many of the problems they addressed were related to helping students learn to deal with teachers, helping them realize that teachers are human and have hearts and can be approached for assistance. We found that most of these kids really want to be part of the school, and we asked them how they would get involved if their GPAs were up to par. A lot of them said they would get involved in sports and clubs, but they just don't know how to do it.

Focusing on Attendance, Truancy, and Academic Services

I have four Indian staff members who assist me in our program, which serves about 950 students in our district. We have been working on the attendance issue and our dropout problem. Six years ago we had a 10 percent absentee rate, and now we have that down to around two percent. We have worked with the truant officer to catch attendance problems immediately. If she is unable to locate the family or determine why the student is absent she immediately informs our Title V office. Since we know the aunts and uncles and cousins, we can probably contact them and find out where this student is. So they know we are going to be looking for them. After awhile, they get so that they don't want us looking for them, so they come back to school. Personal letters have also helped. If our students have perfect attendance at the end of the first semester, they get a letter signed by all of the staff in the office. This has been interesting, because now each semester young people come in and say, "Oh, I didn't get my letter yet. Have you checked my attendance yet?" So this has been a help. We also send home congratulatory letters for each of our students who make the honor roll.

At the end of the school year, we also have a potluck supper and award certificates to those young people who have only missed school perhaps one to four days. That has been a terrific

incentive because they feel specially honored and we give a small prize to them like a gift certificate to Arby's or McDonald's. So the outside community is helping us with this also.

We also try to work with junior high and high school students to find out why they might not want to finish school. Some of them said, "Well, what's the use, because there's nothing to come back to...we don't want to go to Phoenix or to work in Los Angeles or Albuquerque...we want to stay close to home." So we have taken several steps. A few years ago we invited tribal members from the Department of Economic Development of each of the four tribes to come in and describe their five-year plans. This gave our young people and their parents an idea of what to prepare for, so they had better incentive. They know that there will be jobs in health, fire and police services, and so forth, so this gives them a better idea of why they should finish school. We also have brought in different Indian professionals to provide role models for kids. They can speak from personal experience about what it is possible to achieve. We do this at monthly brown bag lunches where the kids tell us what areas they are interested in and we find speakers so they can come and listen and ask questions. We may only have eight to ten show up each month, but their horizons are expanded. Over the past five years we have found that everyone who attended some of these luncheons has gone on to community college or a four-year college after graduation.

Another strategy that has worked very well for us is to take those who have been very successful in school on an award trip. Parents have recommended that students must be on the honor roll for at least two semesters, and then we take them on a two-day expense-paid vacation during spring break. This trip has to include instruction in something that is going on in the state or make them aware of another tribe in the state. We started out with seven young people qualifying. The second year we had 15 that were eligible and each year after that it has gone up to 21, 28, and 32. One year we had 14 students in the National Honor Society, so this has really helped them.

Another strategy we use with parents, in order to make them more aware of their own needs for education, is that we promise to buy lunch for anyone who gets their GED and a dinner for anyone who gets an associates of arts degree. This is funded through extra projects from our parents group and not from Title V funds.

When students drop out, we follow up with personal consultations and letters saying what their alternatives might be, especially if they are over 18.

Our tribe is near the Nevada border and we have tried several strategies to combat the dropout situation. First, we established our own school district within the county, so we basically have a Native American representative on the governmental board of the county. Working with the tribal government and the local community government, we were able to place our own Native American member on the County Board of Education. Then we have taken Impact Aid monies that the school receives and hired an Indian liaison who works with parents, the school, and children who have truancy and attendance problems.

Being on the border makes things very difficult because it is not always clear who is responsible for the kids. In the elementary school we have 50 percent Native American students. When they reach the high school, they are shipped across into Nevada for school. They go from an elementary school of 120 to a high school of 2500, and we lose them at the ninth grade. So our tribe has passed a resolution to set money aside to fund an incentive program for these kids, to encourage them to finish school with a certain grade point average. For instance, we may give a freshman who finishes ninth grade $100. He or she can take it and run or go on to become a sophomore. We will double the amount up to the senior year.

At the same time we will have our liaison smothering students with information about the importance of higher education. Since we have begun these programs we have seen an improvement in enrollment and a reduction in truancy with these kids.

- As an attorney, I have had occasion to deal with expulsion hearings, where an Indian child is at the bottom of the barrel and everything is failing. Very often there are significant disciplinary problems and there are major academic deficiencies for that child. There are also problems with relevance and the young person wonders, "What does this institution have to offer me?" It can actually be very relevant, if we can step back and say, "Look, this is a game that we play, this system is a game and you can have a positive interaction without feeling that it is a reflection on your culture or your people." I have found that this approach empowers the child. It also empowers the family, by giving them a new perspective, that it isn't necessary to reject everything because there are conflicts.

Teen Parenting Programs

- The Phoenix District has two programs for young women with babies, and in both cases we work with the Phoenix Indian Center by having them refer students to us that they know are out in the community and not attending school because of pregnancy. On the basis of referrals, we are able to register eligible students in these programs, where they are required to take a child development course, or they are matched up with their regular high school program, wherever they left off. We also offer counseling for the students in terms of what happens after the baby is born. It is our experience that being pregnant is less likely to keep a young mother out of school than what happens after the baby arrives. They usually think that "Grandma, Mom, or Auntie is going to take care of the baby." Well, Auntie takes care of the baby until the first opportunity for employment comes along, and then the mother is out of school again. So we help young mothers access social services for help with child care in the local community. We have had fair success with that approach.

Community and Business Partnerships

- The Phoenix Indian Center conducted a needs assessment that covered the greater metropolitan area including Phoenix, Mesa, Scottsdale, and Tempe. We looked at the private sector's hiring practices and entry level requirements. We also looked at other community-based minority organizations that serve Chicanos and Blacks to compare our ability to reach our clients. On the basis of this information, we designed a leadership project that would be based on a partnership, linking all of these people together.

We started working with schools four years ago to help bring the dropout rate down. Our partners include corporations such as U.S. West, Digital, and Motorola; the governor's office; and local city governments, all of whom are willing to provide in-kind contributions for our kids, at the same time that we encourage them to consider multi-cultural diversity in their working environments.

We now are serving younger brothers and sisters of older students who have been in our programs and graduated. In some families we are working with kids at three different grade levels. We have parents who are really committed, and the whole family is involved in our organization. We believe that motivation and creativity are just as important as receiving additional money from the federal government. Even rural areas can establish good programs in partnerships with other organizations. The key ingredient is motivated and inspired staff. We need to go beyond traditional program boundaries and start looking at how we can take care of one another.

We have quarterly networking sessions where we bring in key decisionmakers from the schools, businesses and community-based organizations and we talk about the ways we can continue to work together without taking over any of the school district's responsibilities. This is especially important, since we have no guarantee that our program will be around next year.

In our in-school program, we work with 193 kids. Our afterschool project serves anywhere from 25 to 50 kids and many of their parents. We also have a partnership with the Arizona state universities and their special Indian projects (the Center for Indian Education, American Indian Institute, and the American Indian Law and Minority Counseling Program). We co-sponsor two conferences each year where we bring in about 150 kids for sessions on the university campus. We try to get the universities more involved; we now are included in the budget for undergraduate admissions at ASU, so they are now starting to contribute funds as well as professional time.

Employability Strategies

- In any program working with potential dropouts at any grade level, there is a need to present students with some perspective of what is going on in the educational system and how that relates to their communities. This will give them a better sense of the relevance of their own experience.

- Our program is on a 12-month cycle. During the first nine months, we work with the school system itself, providing activities to help maintain students' interest in school. Then in the summer out of a total of 190 students we work with about 52 who are selected to participate in a World of Work shadowing program. When they are selected, we have them identify career goals and then they spend part of the summer in a mentoring situation. As part of the training, before we assign them to job sites, we deliver a 64-hour World of Work seminar at a nearby community college. Part of the curriculum involves their doing research in the careers that interest them, and part of it is focused on employability skills and effective communications. We use computers and word processing to increase their computer literacy. We also teach them peer and self-evaluation skills. When they go out for a mentoring placement, they have to develop a resume and interview with their mentor. This is one strategy that has worked to help keep our kids in school during the five years that begin with eighth grade.

- People talk about getting more Indians involved in math and science and into laboratory situations, and yet most of the labs are not in Indian communities. So if you succeed in this course of study, you may end up cutting yourself off from your tribe and your people. It doesn't have to be that way, if children can learn that these are useful tools and there are many possible ways of employing them in tribal communities as well, but you don't very often hear that approach.

Increasing Parent Support

- A lot of dropouts, perhaps 70 percent, come from families of dropouts, where their brothers and sisters and maybe even their parents were also dropouts. One year in our GED program we graduated two mothers and their daughters, which was really outstanding for them. But we feel that there is promise in establishing family literacy programs, where the total family comes in together to work on reading and writing. They discover that learning is fun, and it is fun to go to the library. This works in a positive way on both the children's and the parents' self-esteem and their attitude toward schooling and education.

Adult Education

- I work with the BIA Adult Education Program in Fort Defiance Navajo. I have been in education for 15 to 20 years and have taught in the lower elementary grades prior to going into adult education. I have found that schools really need to concentrate on educating parents and then on trying to keep the students in school. We are close to the borderline of a public school district, and a lot of the public schools take our students away. We try to keep them at the BIA school, because we have a lot of teachers who are Navajo and speak the Native language and we feel they do a better job of teaching our own children and giving them a sense of self-esteem. In contrast, in the public schools your Indian heritage and the history of your people doesn't really make a difference. They learn the history of the United States, but they don't know how that is different from the history of their people. Many of these kids don't even know who their tribal representatives are. At the tribal school we also work with a lot of students, especially eighth graders, who are over-age. We served 15 of these students last year in our Adult Education program. However, many of our teachers, including myself, only work part time, so this is a problem.

IV. Recommendations

Influencing the System

- In our district 15 percent of the student population is Indian. All we have been hearing lately is about cuts to funding for JOM and Title V. We need to keep that money coming and we could use more of it so we can have enough counselors to really help our Native American students. We have found that our counselors can help our students stay in school, so we need to provide their services. The regular high school counselors are so busy with scheduling classes and other responsibilities that they do not help our Indian students. We need more counselors for our students at all levels, Kindergarten through 12, because the little guys need support too.

- Teachers who work with Indian students on or near a reservation should be required to take classes in the Indian culture and history of the area for recertification.

- All of us--families, communities, tribal governments, state and federal governments--have a responsibility and obligation to provide some of the possible solutions to this problem. For example, if tribes established educational goals--say that everyone would read at ninth grade level--then perhaps the schools would respond. If the social service providers in our community developed safe houses for our children who are abused and are afraid to go home at night, perhaps they would not be on the streets. If we had alternative schools within our high schools where students could study for their GED or where alternative approaches were used, perhaps students would stay in school.

- Many states, like Arizona and Wyoming, have laws that if a student misses ten or more days of school, he or she is dropped from the rolls. There should be a mandated hearing that includes teachers, the administrator, and the family as a whole before students are dropped and when they come back into school.

- Educational leaders and tribal leaders have within their possession the mechanisms whereby they can restructure the educational systems. On a fundamental level, our education needs to

be established on a foundation of our culture, our language, and self-esteem, as well as a system where students are involved in decisionmaking.

- These at-risk students can learn, contrary to what many seem to believe. They also want to learn. We need to implement alternative ways of teaching and alternate ways of measuring student performance. Standardized testing is not the only way to do this.

- One program director in a public school system with 25 percent Native enrollment has taken on the task of increasing cultural understanding and awareness by volunteering to share introductions to Indian culture at inservices, classroom workshops, different civic organization meetings, and with any other group that has an interest. This seems to help get rid of some of the stereotypes in the community.

- It would be interesting to advance the concept that Impact Aid is really in a sense tribal taxation dollars, since it is provided in lieu of tax-exempt status for land. This way a tribe might have greater influence on expenditure of this money.

Early Intervention

- We need students to discover who they are early in elementary school. They need to discover what their interests and strengths are and what areas they need to work hard on, so that students can own their own learning. They should be allowed to select their own projects within a given subject, so that their work will hold their attention and develop their concentration. We also must accept a student's communication first as it is spoken, allowing an integrated speaking and writing approach, so that formal written language can be successfully acquired later. We should be giving grades on the basis of process as well as product. I graduated in 1958 with my elementary certificate from a Ford Foundation-sponsored program with the City of San Francisco. The focus of that credentialing program is what we are still looking for today. These programs should encourage teachers to ask what individual students need in order to take charge of their own learning. The programs should enable teachers to offer a balance of affective and cognitive learning and utilize different instructional strategies such as cooperative learning groups, and learning by doing, imagining, and experiencing.

The Importance of Administrative and Teacher Support

- To bring about structural change, you have to have people who want change and want it to begin with them, not the students. This includes teachers, administrators, cooks, drivers, and secretaries. Everyone has to put themselves on the line to learn a completely new approach. When you are working with students at risk, it means a complete and totally different perception from the way we were trained in the university. You have to have staff who are willing to get involved with students and meet their social as well as emotional needs, because if this is not done, where will these students gain their self-confidence and their strength to face something that is new?

- I cannot stress enough the importance of having an administrator who is willing to do something about a situation. This is where change must start in your local school. If administrative and staff support is not in place, parental involvement is not going to happen. You will not be able to sell the students on the idea that they can learn, that you have something to offer them, that you have a challenge for them. They won't accept this until the staff earns the students' respect.

- We also have to figure out what to do with the bureaucracy. When you want to establish a school program to help these kids achieve, you still have to have the support of a superintendent who knows what is happening. You also have to consider what you are going to do with the state and district regulations that are inflexible and restrict what you are able to do for these kids. You have to have a bureaucracy and a policy environment that allow you to provide the kinds of programs and services needed.

- When our tutors provide one-on-one support to an elementary school child, they are aware of the family, the background, and the history. That is why it is important that Indian people work with Indian children. So many of us are related by community or by blood, there is much less resistance from the family and the child that you are trying to work with, especially on sensitive issues like substance abuse, physical abuse, or neglect.

- Red Lake Public School District in Minnesota has embarked on a long-range plan to work with the school district to address the problem of overage students dropping out. They have developed a list of effective characteristics for a Red Lake teacher on the basis of student input. They then developed job descriptions on this basis and have begun to supervise teachers accordingly. The comments about racism are true there also, but it is interesting what kids will say about teachers they like: "He talks to me, he's fair, he challenges me."

- According to findings of the Navajo Dropout Study it is important that dropout prevention programs pay attention to what is going on in the classroom and to the quality of teachers. Students told us again and again that what is important about good teachers and good teaching and learning experiences is that teachers are fair, consistent, respect students, respect their culture and their language, don't underestimate them, and really care about them. They rated high those teachers who can provide a challenging and interesting kind of curriculum for students. These are things we can do something about; and many of the solutions are just plain common sense.

- I think all of our students are special and gifted and worth recognizing. They are not getting this in school. If you are special, you can learn all of these other things. So we need to have teachers with creativity and vision, and they must also have the dedication and determination to make things work. The bottom line is not funding, it is your staff, your accountability, and your determination.

- In terms of getting more Indian teachers, our district is working with AHEC and our tribally controlled colleges, but it is going to take time. So we need to educate our non-Indian teachers about the culture and traditions and the low self-esteem that Indian people have, so that they can relate to and effectively teach our children.

<u>The Role of Parents</u>

- Parents have a role to play in dropout prevention, especially as advocates for their child's education. Sometimes parents have to make a choice between living in an urban setting where you may lose touch with your language and culture. These are hard choices, but to me it is important that parents maintain their sense of direction. When you do have your culture and your language, it is a big plus and something you can resort back to. But my two children are going to a prep school, by my choice, so they will be prepared for a better life. As parents we do have a choice of preventing our children from dropping out by saying, "Hey, this is the direction I want you to take." Most children are looking for direction from their Elders, from family, teachers, counselors, and other adults.

- Parents who participate in our schools, who come to parent-teacher conferences, who come to basketball games and music concerts, who support all of the extracurricular activities that their children participate in, generally do not have children who are at risk. The parents of at-risk children are those we do not see in the schools. They are usually involved in so many other things and issues of their own that they do not have time to come to school. Other life issues make it hard for them to support education. I believe we need to provide parenting skills and programs to increase parental involvement for at-risk children. When parents are not available, we need to work with whoever is key in that child's life, whether it is the grandmother or grandfather, the sister or brother, aunt or uncle.

- In Santa Barbara County it seems easier for parents to be involved and supportive of their children when they are young. We encourage a networking support for parents, so they will not give up on supporting their children. The PTA is involved, we also involve retired people in the community, and we are setting up a partnership with the community. This allows us to find sponsors for activities like an Indian Club, even if there is no one in the school who can serve as a faculty advisor. This takes time, but eventually you can find people who are interested.

Teen Parenting & Drug and Alcohol Programs

- We need to provide day care and young mother programs in our schools, and we need to continue to provide a lot of drug and alcohol education programs. We have provided some of these over the past few years, but they need to be strengthened. The drug and alcohol issue alone is a major one in many of our communities and we need to work on it to reduce abuse on the reservations.

Quality Vocational Education as an Option

- Last week I attended a meeting in Portland, OR, for educators from around the Northwest and the Pacific, entitled "Can minorities and low income students be taught?" The meeting focused on ways to address the dropout problem. Everyone answered the title question with a "yes." In seeking answers to the problems one of the ideas that came up was offering vocational education as an option that could take the place of programs with a primary focus on academics. Vocational education is a little more attractive than it was a few years ago. It now includes high technology offerings like office skills, computers, and so forth. So for students who are sick and tired of books, it is not a bad option to give them something they can do with their hands.

- The BIA ran vocational programs in the past, and some of the tribes will be contracting to run AVT programs. When the Bureau ran these programs, it did not administer them correctly and there were a lot of funds that never reached our people. Tribal contractors will be more concerned and better able to use those funds to the advantage of Indian students.

- I have recently funded two students to the International Air Academy in Vancouver, WA. You all realize that the largest corporations are mandated to hire a certain number of minorities. So one of these students was hired by United Airlines in Seattle, and the other was hired by American Airlines right after graduation. So we should be looking more into vocational training programs.

Development of State and National Databases

- Indian country needs to develop a good database of children who are at risk. We also need to have a more universal definition of who these children are. Different districts have different definitions of who is a dropout, and so do states. To realistically provide services, we have to have some kind of criteria to go by, so this type of database is really important.

- We need to have access to better information about programs that work and different approaches and strategies that are successful, so we aren't each operating in isolation using only our own theories about what might be effective.